

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAM-01 SAB-01 IO-10 /062 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4496

S E C R E T BEIRUT 6670

EO 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINS, LE

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON CURRENT SITUATION

1. DCM MAY 25 GIVEN FOLLOWING BACKGROUND OF CURRENT CABINET CRISIS BY A PERSON WHO HAS BEEN FOR SOME TIME CLOSE CONFIDANT OF PRESIDENT FRANGIE, BUT WHO OPPOSES THE APPOINTMENT OF THE CURRENT MILITARY CABINET.

2. ACCORDING TO THE INFORMANT, TROUBLE BEGAN WITH KAMAL AS'AD'S (SPEAKER OF THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT) MISINTERPRETATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S REACTION TO TWO POINTS PUT TO HIM LAST WEEKEND. AS'AD SUGGESTED TO THE PRESIDENT THAT HE 'AS'AD) CONSULT WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN AN EFFORT TO DETERMINE DEPUTIES' WISHES AS TO NEXT PRIME MINISTER. THE PRESIDENT SIMPLY NODDED IN RESPONSE. SECONDLY, AS'AD ASKED THE PRESIDENT IF HE HAD PERSONAL CHOICE FOR PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENT REPLIED "NO". ON THE BASIS OF THIS CONVERSATION, AS'AD ASSUMED THAT THE PRESIDENT SUPPORTED HIS CONSULTATION AND THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD ACCEPT ANY CANDIDATE WITH STRONG PARLIAMENTARY BACKING INCLUDING RASHID KARAME. IT WAS OBVIOUS FROM A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WHICH THE INFORMANT HAD WITH THE PRESIDENT THAT THE LATTER CONSIDERED THAT KAMAL AS'AD WAS MAKING HIS CONSULTATIONS ON HIS OWN AND WITH NO COMMITMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT TO ACCEPT THE RESULTS OF THE

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CONSULTATION.

3. IN ANY EVENT AS'AD CANVASSED THE DEPUTIES AND FOUND CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FOR RASHID KARAME AS PRIME MINISTER. HE, THEREUPON, DISCUSSED THE POSSIBILITY OF KARAME'S CANDIDACY WITH KARAME HIMSELF, SAEB SALAAM AND RAYMOND EDDE. THIS GROUP ASSUMED THAT AS'AD WAS SPEAKING WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE PRESIDENT AND DECIDED TO ANNOUNCE KARAME'S CANDIDACY. WHEN THE DEPUTIES, AS IS TRADITIONAL, CALLED ON THE PRESIDENT INDIVIDUALLY TO GIVE THEIR VIEWS ON WHO SHOULD BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER, THE RESULT WAS THAT 21 OPTED FOR KARAME, 9 OPTED FOR KARAME WITH AN ALTERNATIVE, AND 40 LEFT THE CHOICE UP TO THE PRESIDENT. THE PRESIDENT TOLD A FRIEND OF KARAME'S THAT GIVEN THE ABOVE CIRCUMSTANCES HE WOULD NORMALLY APPOINT KARAME ON THE BASIS OF HIS HAVING THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF VOTES AND WOULD THROW THE 40 VOTES GIVEN HIM BY THE DEPUTIES TO KARAME. HOWEVER, HE COULD NOT DO IT UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES BECAUSE KARAME, FOR POLITICAL REASONS, WOULD NEVER AGREE TO USING THE ARMY TO QUELL THE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES AND NEITHER WOULD ANY OTHER SUNNI LEADER. KARAME'S FRIEND THEREFORE ENDEAVORED TO OBTAIN A COMMITMENT IN PRINCIPLE THAT KARAME WOULD USE THE ARMY TO RESTORE LAW AND ORDER. KARAME, QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY RESPONDED THAT NO HEAD OF GOVERNMENT COULD GIVE SUCH A COMMITMENT BECAUSE THE USE OF THE ARMY WOULD OBVIOUSLY DEPEND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

4. ACCORDINGLY, AS THE PRESIDENT PRESUMABLY CONSIDERED THERE WAS NO POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE, HE APPOINTED A MILITARY GOVERNMENT, APPARENTLY WITHOUT MUCH CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS. OUR INFORMANT EXPLAINED THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS ON THE VERGE OF MAKING SAME DECISION IN 1973 BUT WAS DIVERTED BY THE AVAILABILITY OF TAKIEDDINE SOLH, WHOM EVERYONE AT THAT TIME ACCEPTED AS A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE.

5. HIS DECISION INFURIATED THE MOSLEMS BECAUSE (A) THEY FELT THAT RASHID KARAME HAD BEEN DIDDLED AND (B) THEY WERE CONVINCED THAT THE PRESIDENT -- SINCE THE TIME PIERRE GEMAYEL, PHALANGE CHIEF, BEGAN HIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE FEDAYEEN -- HAD BEEN CONTEMPLATING THE APPOINTMENT OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND WAS SIMPLY WAITING FOR

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THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO. OUR INFORMANT DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS IS THE CASE, BUT SAYS IT IS VERY HARD TO CONVINCE THE MOSLEMS OF THIS FACT BECAUSE (A) THE PHALANGISTS STOPPED FIGHTING ONCE THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S FORMATION WAS ANNOUNCED -- THE ARGUMENT BEING THAT THEY WOULD NOT HAVE STOPPED WITHOUT ACHIEVING THEIR OBJECTIVE, AND (B) SOME OF THE MAIN CHRISTIAN QUARTERS IN BEIRUT IMMEDIATELY FIRED SHOTS IN THE AIR IN APPROVAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S

DECISION. THE MOSLEMS, HOWEVER, ARE NOT THE ONLY OPPONENTS OF THE NEW REGIME. MANY CHRISTIANS, EXCLUDING NOTABLY FORMER PRESIDENT CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL, ARE OPPOSED TO THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION BECAUSE, ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMANT, THEY CONSIDER IT A BAD PRECEDENT CONTRARY TO THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM AND THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT WILL SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

6. OUR INFORMANT REPORTS THAT THOSE OPPOSED TO THE GOVERNMENT SEE THE FOLLOWING COURSES OF ACTION: THE FIRST IS TO PERSUADE THE PRESIDENT TO REVERSE HIS DECISION. KAMAL JUMBLATT CALLED ON THE PRESIDENT LAST NIGHT, MAY 25, AND TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO ACCEPT AN ALTERNATE SOLUTION. HE WAS UNSUCCESSFUL. SECONDLY, EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE PRIMARILY BY THE MOSLEMS TO PERSUADE THE PRIME MINISTER TO RESIGN. THIS PERHAPS HAS RELATIVELY MORE CHANCE OF SUCCESS BECAUSE RIFA'I, ACCORDING TO THE INFORMANT, ACCEPTED THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP ON THE UNDERSTANDING HE HAD MORE SUPPORT THAN HE ACTUALLY DOES. THIRDLY, EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE TO ENLIST THE CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PRESIDENT TO CHANGE HIS MIND. AS AN EXAMPLE, RAYMOND EDDE CALLED ON THE MARONITE PATRIARCH YESTERDAY AFTERNOON AND A DELEGATION OF MOSLEMS IS CALLING ON HIM TODAY. FOURTHLY, ACCORDING TO THE INFORMANT, IF ALL ELSE FAILS, THERE WOULD BE EFFORTS TO FORCE THE PRESIDENT TO CHANGE HIS MIND\* WHICH OF COURSE, IS THE ALTERNATIVE EVERYONE IS TRYING TO AVOID.

7. AT THE MOMENT BOTH WE AND THE INFORMANT HAVE DIFFICULTY IN PREDICTING HOW THIS MESS WILL WORK ITSELF OUT. ENCOURAGING IS THE OBVIOUS EFFORT OF THE MOSLEMS AND JUMBLATT YESTERDAY TO BE AS MODERATE AS POSSIBLE PLUS THE FACT THAT THE PROBLEM IS NOT A COMPLETELY CONFESSIONAL ONE

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AS THERE ARE MANY CHRISTIANS WHO OPPOSE THE FORMATION OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT AS VEHEMENTLY AS THE LEFTISTS AND THE MOSLEMS. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS WHO SUPPORT THE CONCEPT OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT OUT OF DISGUST FOR THE MESS THE POLITICIANS HAVE CREATED BUT THESE ARE MOSTLY NON-POLITICAL. ON THE OTHER SIDE, THE PRESTIGE OF THE PRESIDENT, THE PRIME MINISTER AND OTHERS IS AT STAKE. IT IS AS COMPLICATED A POLITICAL CRISIS AS WE HAVE SEEN HERE WITH ELEMENTS OF CONFESSIONALISM, LEBANESE-FEDAYEEN RELATIONS, ANTI FRANGIEHISM, POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM AND GENERAL DISGRUNTLEMENT WITH THE STATE OF AFFAIRS HERE INVOLVED. THE LEBANESE GENIUS FOR WIGGLING OUT OF COMPLICATED SITUATIONS IS BEING GIVEN THE SUPREME TEST.

GODLEY

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